Riddley Walker- *Riddley Walker* is unusual in its style and focus. The first person narrator, Riddley, writes in a distinct form of [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) whose spelling often resembles a phonetic transliteration of a Kentish accent

While the unfamiliar language is a projection of how [historical linguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_linguistics) might apply in the future, it also provides clues to the nature of life in Riddley's world (e.g., being "et" by wild dogs is a common fate), and creates suspense as the reader gradually becomes accustomed to the idiosyncratic narration, and comes to understand some of the references of which Riddley is unaware

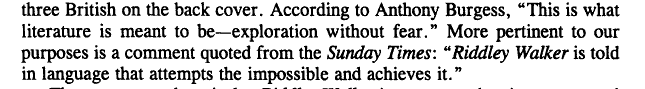
uture in which language along with civilisation has been broken down to shards and fragments. I had to read it about three times before I could read the new language easily – I nearly wrote "comfortably" but it's an impossible book to read comfortably

most people enjoying this novel: its use of a devolved form of English to convey just what's going on in the story and build Riddley's world

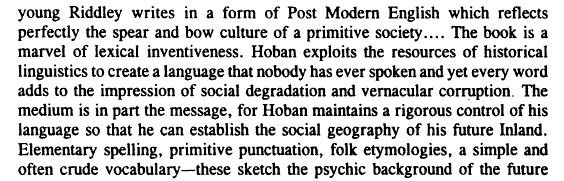
 Riddley Walker is a novel about the things that come in between the other things, and some of those things are the missing vowels and mutated consonants that make up the argot of his world. At times, it's best to just let the language wash over you, rather than try to grasp the meaning of each and every phrase.

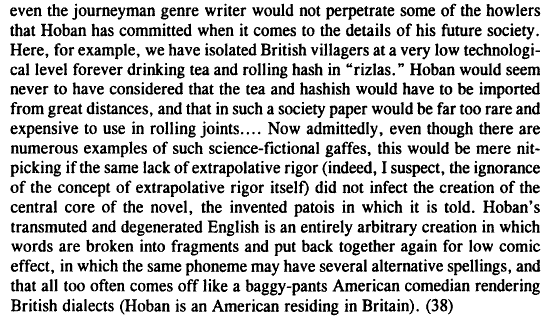
By contrast, I didn't find Riddley Walker's future-Kentish all that hard to understand.  Most of it was just a quirky phonetic English that was easy enough to decipher by reading "aloud" in my head, and the few times new pieces of vocabulary appeared, I found them pretty simple to suss out in context.  There were a few uses of altered meaning or new uses of familiar phrases that I didn't have a handle on, but nothing that kept me from moving forward in the text. And of course, as has been mentioned, a big part of the book's humor revolves around puns, ranging from the vulgar (Bernt Arse) to the whimsical (Do It Over), in the place names, which I found both enjoyable and informative

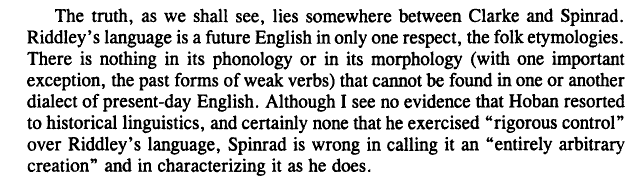
**Tasha Robinson:**I guess I'm glad my edition didn't have an afterword or a glossary, because it was a welcome and personal revelation to me when I realized, three-quarters of the way through the book, how the language was making me slow down and puzzle through what I was reading, and how that process mirrored Riddley's painstaking struggle to set his words down on paper. Everyone above seems to have assumed that everyone in Riddley's world speaks exactly as his words look on paper; I didn't. He admits that most people in his world don't read or write, and he himself is a borderline illiterate, sweating to capture his experiences because he knows he's on the edge of something important—literally, in the sense that he's been nearby but apart as gunpowder was rediscovered and humanity started clawing its way back toward killing the baby, and figuratively, in that he's constantly working for his tels and connexions, trying to puzzle out what it all means. I got the sense throughout that it's all on the tip of his tongue to say what it all means, why Punch kills the baby and why people want to put the Shining Addom back together, and what both symbolize and signify—but he's still young, and it's all a bit beyond him. Still, he hopes that by getting it all down laboriously in text, he can pass it on to future generations, and maybe help them take that first step up from the mud. Having Hoban spell all that out for me in an afterword would have taken some of the sentiment and sorrow out of it for me

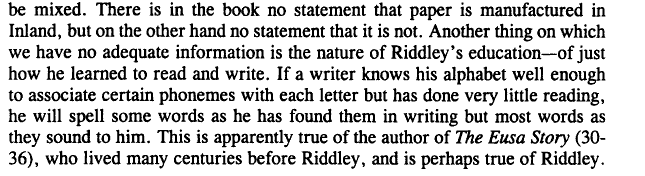


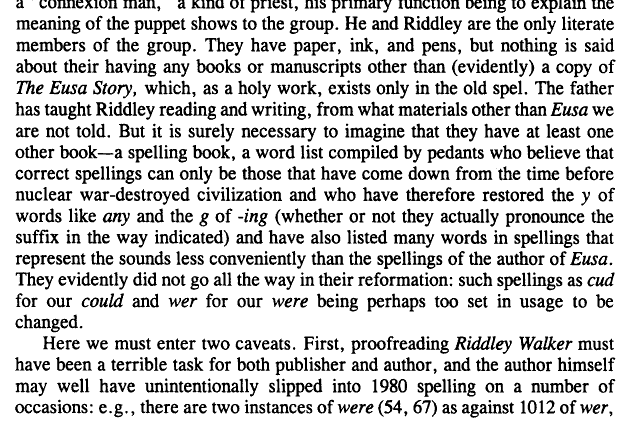
Lexical (relating to the individual words that make up the vocabulary of a language) inventiveness .

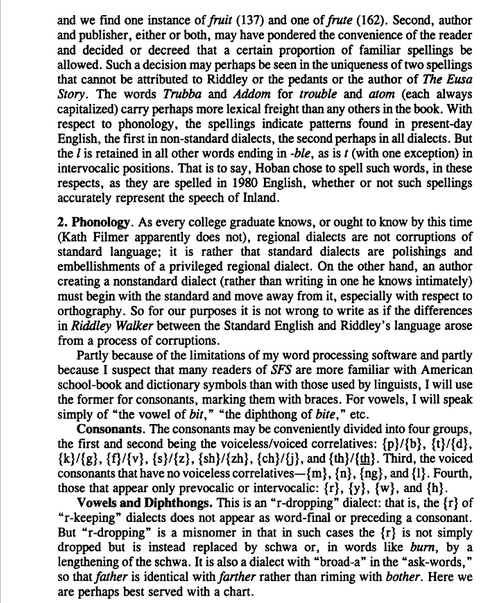












***Language is the most important aspect in the life of all beings.***

***We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture***

***Week 1 Lecture Notes-***

One might say that this is a way of thinking or an attitude rather than a

single idea, but it is important in how teachers and other people involved in

education view their students, or at least the language that some of their

students use.

Recall that linguists are descriptive, which means that we describe

language, and do not make judgements about some sentences or words

being better than others, and we do not tell people what to say and what

not to say.

Linguists are therefore not prescriptive, but there is a long prescriptive

tradition in the history of English, according to which some ways of

speaking are bad or incorrect.

• This is clearly relevant in the classroom, since a teacher may encounter

different varieties of English, and we may then ask what the approach to

these be?

• At one point, when prescriptivism was dominant, non-standard varieties of

English were seen as being incorrect, and if forms from them were used

by a student, they were “corrected” and the student was told not to use

them. We now talk about standard and non-standard varieties of English

(and other languages) rather than right and wrong forms (that is, right and

wrong words and sentences).

This is not to say that the standard variety of English should not be taught;

rather the attitude is that the standard variety is not better than any other

variety (as some people used to think); however, society considers it

important to use the standard variety in some contexts (for example in a

law court), and so students should be taught how to speak and write the

standard variety.

This does not mean that a non-standard variety is inferior in any way or

that its use should be discouraged in all contexts -- indeed for many

speakers there may be some contexts (such as in family situations) where

the non-standard variety is more appropriate than the standard variety.

We therefore should not tell students (as used to be done) that a form that

they use is incorrect, although we might say that another form might be

appropriate in certain contexts, and this will have major effects on how we

teach about language in the classroom.

We might also look at what Chomsky has said about prescriptivism; in

1991 he stated:

• “I think sensible prescriptivism ought to be part of any education. I would

certainly think that students ought to know the standard literary language

with all its conventions, its absurdities, its artificial conventions, and so on

because that’s a real cultural system, and an important cultural system.”- Rather, he is saying, as I have already argued, that students should be

taught the standard language -- not because it is important to use the

standard language in certain social situations (as in a job interview) -- but

because it is part of our culture. (He might also agree that it is important to

know the standard language for job interviews, etc.). In fact, Chomsky thinks that standard literary English has to be taught in

schools, since it is not a variety that people would acquire naturally:

According to him, “Much of it [the standard literary language] is a violation

of natural law. In fact, a good deal of what’s taught is taught because it’s

wrong.” By “wrong”, Chomsky means going against the rules of English; he says,

“You don’t have to teach people their native language because it grows in

their minds”, while standard literary English is, in a sense, an artificial and

unnatural language which children would not acquire naturally.

VARIATION IN LANGUAGE

• Hudson also mentions the idea of **variation**, which is connected with

descriptivism, as descriptivism not only notes that there is variation in

language, but accepts variant forms of a language as equal.

• It is very clear that there is variation in all languages, based on several

factors:

• for example, geographical variation (that is, in dialects) and variation

based on social class (that is, in what have been called sociolects).

• However, every speaker of language employs different varieties of a

language, for example in different social settings (for example in formal

and informal contexts), though we may not be fully aware of this.

• In addition, different genres of kinds of texts, such as stories, essays, etc.

(and we use texts to mean both oral and written stretches of language)

vary in the language used in them.

• Also, written and spoken language are different -- not only do they involve

different media (sounds vs. marks on paper), but they are different

linguistic characteristics -- writing is **not** simply recording spoken language

on paper. (We shall have more to say about this later in the course).

• Given that different types of language appear in, and are appropriate for,

different situations, kinds of texts, etc., one might think that it is important

for students to get some instruction about different kinds of situations and

texts and what is appropriate in them.

• The same applies to the teaching of foreign languages -- there is not one

monolithic French, or German, or Italian: each of these languages, and

every other language, involves many varieties, and the successful foreign

language learner will have to be able to use some of these to be able to

behave appropriately in that language, and thus the teacher will have to

teach about it.

• However, it is only possible to do this if we, and educators, are fully aware

of the fact and extent of variation that occurs in languages. Linguistics tells

us that this variation exists, and contemporary approaches to the teaching

of English (for students who are native speakers) in schools have now

taken this on board.

• For example, the NSW K-6 Syllabus brings up a range of different types of

texts and

discusses what students at different stages should be doing in

relation to them.

3.3 LANGUAGE AS A SYSTEM

• Another general idea from linguistics is that **language is a system**:

According to Hudson, “This view of language as a system is perhaps the

single most important idea that language has to offer schools”. If it is so

important we should explain what we mean by it, and why it is so

important.

• A language consists of a finite (though large) set of units at various levels

(the level of sounds, the level of words, and the level of sentences), which

are put together according to sets of rules (that is, there are rules for how

sounds combine to form words, and how words combine to form

sentences). In fact, language has been described as a system of systems.

• Perhaps the most important point here is the fact that languages are

governed by *rules* (and higher level rules which we call *principles*).

Most people might be unaware of the fact that languages are systems, or if

they are they might only think of standard languages as systems.

• However, every variety of a language is a system; that is, non-standard

varieties are not simply random collections of “mistakes” -- what happens

in non-standard varieties follows rules, just as happens with standard

language.

• This is a fact that comes out of a careful examination of non-standard

varieties, and is thus again an insight due to linguistic research, and it

reinforces the point I mentioned before, which is that there is no inherent

difference between standard and non-standard varieties of a language.

*3.4.1 Sounds vs. Letters*

• One of these is that fact that “Sounds are different from letters”.

• According to Hudson, “Even those who specialise in teaching young

children are prone to confuse letters with sounds”.

• However, sounds and letters are quite different sorts of things, and one

letter can represent more than one sound (that is, can be pronounced

differently), while one sound can be represented by more than one letter

(that is, can be spelled differently).

• Everyone is aware of this to some extent, but to teach spelling effectively

(and to teach pronunciation of a foreign language effectively) one needs to

know about the extent to which spelling and pronunciation can diverge.

• Consider the following simple example: when do we use *a* and *an*? -- This

is a question that could come up in primary school, or in a class on English

as a second language.

• The answer should be simple: we use *a* before words starting with a

consonant and *an* before words starting with a vowel.

What then about the word *unique*? We say *a unique idea*, not *an unique*

*idea*.

• This is not a problem at all, since unique begins with a consonant, namely

[j]. It only appears to be a problem if we think that letters and sounds are

the same;

• However, if we clearly distinguish between sounds and the letters that

represent them, and if we are aware that English is not always an accurate

representation of the pronunciation of English …

• and specifically that there are some sounds which are not represented in

spelling, such as the [j] which begins the word *unique*,

• and if we use the terms *consonant* and *vowel* only for sounds, not for

letters …

• we can say that *a* occurs before words that start with consonants, and *an*

before words starting with vowels, and this rule covers cases such as that of *unique*.

*3.4.2 Words, Lexemes, and Word-Forms*

• The word *word* is ambiguous. Are *cat* and *cats* the same word or not? In

one sense of *word* they are not, obviously *cat* and *cats* are not the same

since the latter has an extra sound that the former does not. On the other

hand, dictionaries do not have separate entries for them, and perhaps in a

very complete dictionary *cats* would be in the entry for *cat* as its plural

form, i.e. they are different forms of the same word.

• This situation could lead to confusion in educational contexts, for example

if someone says that a young child can produce 20 different words. If we

distinguish clearly between these two senses of *word* such confusion will

not arise.

• We use *lexeme* for *word* in the sense that *cat* and *cats* are the same word,

i.e. (analogously to phoneme and morpheme) for the abstract word which

shows up in different forms in actual occurrence, and *word-form* for the

sense in which they are different words.

• Thus being able to produce 20 different lexemes is rather different from

being able to produce 20 word-forms, as in some languages some

lexemes have hundreds or thousands of different word-forms (as some

verbs in e.g. Turkish have hundreds of different forms for tenses, person

agreement, etc.).

*3.4.3 Punctuation and Sentences*

• Hudson says, “Sentences as defined by punctuation are different from

those defined by grammatical structure. It is a waste of time, or worse, to

exhort children to put full-stops at the end of their sentences before they

have some understanding of grammatical sentence-hood”.

• Hudson does not comment further on this, but one might think it obvious

that children are going to have trouble using punctuation properly if they

do not have an explicit understanding of how sentences are put together.

• Therefore, when teaching punctuation (and writing generally) it would be

good if teachers clearly explained matters such as what a sentence is from

a structural point of view (as opposed to defining a sentence as a stretch

of language which starts with a capital letter and finishes with a full stop,

which would not be very useful).

“In teaching punctuation, secondary teachers tended to associate

punctuation with sound rather than with sentence structure, which may

have added to pupils’ problems”.

• This study led to new practices such as “explaining that punctuation is

used to separate syntactical units of meaning and focusing on the

meaning rather than the sound of sentences”

*Language Use vs. Language Structure*

Therefore teachers should not say something like “this is wrong”, but

rather perhaps something like “this is a correct expression in English, but it

is more appropriate to use it at home than in the class room (or in an

essay)”.

REGISTERS

• Recall that registers are varieties of language used in different situations,

so even if we look at standard English, there will be a range of different

registers belonging to it.

• Knowing about registers and when to use them is an important part of

language use; to operate successfully in society we have to know which

register is appropriate for which situation (and to know the details of that

register, such as particular vocabulary items).

• From this point of view, linguistics is again useful for every subject taught

in school, not just English and other languages:

• Hudson says, “Language is fundamental to EVERY SUBJECT, and not

just to those subjects where it is the primary object of study. Every

subject has its terminology and its presentation styles – a science report

is linguistically different from a history essay – and pupils are expected to

learn each of these registers.”

• Teachers at the secondary school level may have to teach students

about the importance of appropriate register use:

• One webpage about teaching registers lists among the “learning

activities”: “Make learners aware that schools use formal register and

that standardized tests are written in formal register, and, if they go for a job interview, they will want to use formal register with the person who is

conducting the interview. This could make the difference in whether or

not they get the job.”

• “The use of formal register allows one to do better in school, to score

higher on tests, and even to get the more desirable job. Learners will be

able to communicate more effectively with all types of people in many

different situations if they understand these registers.”

• So, teaching native speakers (as well as non-native speakers) about

registers is, or should be, a significant part of what they learn about

English, and linguists can help with this by giving teachers good

information on registers:

• Hudson states, “linguists should be able to describe the registers more

efficiently than the non-linguist specialist teachers themselves can.” A linguistically aware teacher, that is one who has learned some of the

facts about different registers of English, could then have a informed

discussion with students on the subject, saying that:

• “Everyone uses different varieties of English, and any variety they might

use is no worse or no better than any other variety.”

• “However, society sees certain varieties as appropriate for certain

situations, just as various other kinds of behavior are appropriate for

particular situations, for example particular kinds of clothing.”

• “Just as it would be seen as inappropriate to wear a swimsuit to a

funeral, even though there is nothing wrong with swimsuits, it is seen as

inappropriate to use certain varieties of language in certain situations,

although there is nothing wrong with them at all.

• “It would also be inappropriate to wear a tie to the beach, although there

is nothing wrong with ties, and it would be inappropriate to use a formal

register in a pub. We are therefore not making value judgements about

varieties of English, we are simply saying that certain varieties are

appropriate for particular situations.”

• The teacher could then go through various registers of English and some

of their features.

• From this discussion of the application of linguistics to the field of English

for native speakers, we have seen that it would help not only with this

field but with other fields, potentially all fields of study, and with practical

training for the post-school period in a student’s life.

She also says, “When teaching literacy we must be aware of the nature

and variety of language, the significance of talk and narrative, … as well

as the range of different literacies inside and outside the school setting”.

A fact connected with this is that the process of learning to read is quite

different from that of learning to speak, and teachers should be aware of

this.

• We know this because of what we know about first language acquisition,

a major branch of linguistics.

• Every normal child learns to speak without instruction and without

conscious effort (i.e. you do not need to go to school to become a

speaker of your native language), while reading requires work and effort

to learn, and usually involves instruction by someone else.

Also, humans have been speaking for far longer than we have been

reading: written language only goes back 5000 years or so, while spoken

language goes back at least some tens of thousands of years ago.

• Therefore, speaking is a part of being human (Chomskyans would say

that language is hard-wired into us, it is part of our biological

endowment), while there are many normal humans in the world who do

not read and write.

TEACHING WRITING SKILLS AND COMPOSITION

• Linguistics might also help in the teaching of writing skills. By “writing

skills” I mean something like how to construct a good essay.

• Some linguists have looked at what makes a well-formed text: a text is

not simply a collection of sentences; the sentences have to be related to

one another and be connected to one another.

• **Note that this is different from syntax (or grammar), which is concerned**

**with well-formed sentences**, i.e. how phrases and words are combined to

form sentences; the study of texts (which can mean either written or oral

texts, though we are concerned with the former here) is about how

sentences are combined to form texts.

• As with other areas of teaching, there may be a lack of interest or

understanding on the part of linguists and educators about each other’s

fields:

• In their (2006) review of the book *Language and Writing: Applications of*

*Linguistics to Rhetoric and Composition* Edwin Battistella and Tracey

Baker state, “The relationship between linguistic theory and research and

teaching in composition is sometimes characterized by frustration and

misunderstanding. Rhetoricians seeking to “apply” linguistics to the

composition classroom often cannot find cogent accounts of how to put

linguistic theory into practice in teaching writing; as a result, some

rhetoricians unfortunately conclude that linguistics is of no value for

them”.

• However, one could argue that linguistics is indeed of value for teaching

composition, i.e. how to write a good essay.

• Teachers may feel that their students’ essays are not well constructed,

but unless they have explicit knowledge about text structure, they may

not be able to clearly explain to their students what the problems are.

There are linguistic theories which deal with *coherence* and *cohesion*: a

well-formed text must be coherent and cohesive.

• For a text to be *coherent* (in this technical sense) means roughly that it

must be about something, i.e. a text cannot be a random collection of

sentences on various topics.

• Both teachers and students may have an intuitive understanding of this,

but coherence is difficult to define precisely.

• Consider the following example of a text which is not coherent:

• “Many people have cats as pets. My aunt Mary’s cat doesn’t like fish.

The cats in the pet store on the corner are very expensive.”

• On the surface this text might appear to be coherent, since it is about

cats. However, it really is not about any single subject: just because a

text consists of sentences which all mention the same thing, cats in this

case, does not mean that it is coherent.

• By presenting and discussing example texts which are and are not

coherent, teachers might be able to develop students’ sense of what

makes a coherent text, which would lead to an improvement in their

essay writing, but in order to do this teachers need to have studied the

notion of coherence and to have some explicit understanding of it, as

opposed to simply having intuitions about coherence.

• *Cohesion* involves the linking together of different sentences of a text,

and different parts of those sentences.

• There is a whole range of cohesive devices and if teachers have explicit

knowledge about them, they can help students use them and thus make

their essays better.

• For example sentences and parts of sentences can be linked together by

words such as and, but, however, and because.

• They can also be linked (less overtly) by using words involved in various

lexical relationships such as synonymy, hyponymy (the relation between

more inclusive and less inclusive terms), and meronymy (the relation

between words naming parts and words naming the wholes of which

they are a part).

• By explicitly going through some of these devices teachers can help their

students write better essays, because they will be cohesive, but in order

to do this, teachers have to have a good understanding of cohesion and

ways of making a text cohesive (not just an intuition that a text is or is not

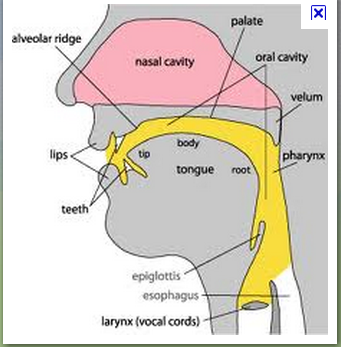
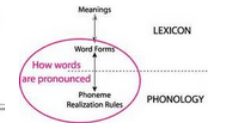
cohesive).

*LING3280*

 As a whole, linguistics concerns itself with three major problems: how we learn languages, how languages vary, and what is universal to language. Serious progress has been made on these questions during the 20th century, but there is still much more to investigate. Language is probably the most complex form of human behaviour

In [linguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics), **grammar** is the set of [structural](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural) rules that govern the composition of [sentences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentence_(linguistics)), [phrases](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrase), and [words](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Words) in any given [natural language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_language). The term refers also to the study of such rules, and this field includes [morphology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morphology_(linguistics)), [syntax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax), and [phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonology), often complemented by [phonetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonetics), [semantics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantics), and [pragmatics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatics). Linguists do not normally use the term to refer to [orthographical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthography) rules, although usage books and [style guides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_guide) that call themselves grammars may also refer to spelling and punctuation

Many of the sub-fields of linguistics are arranged on a spectrum from concrete form to abstract meaning. Ranging from concrete to abstract, these include [phonetics](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-phonetics.htm) (the physical properties of speaking and listening), [phonology](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-phonology.htm) (the study of specific sounds that make up words), [morphology](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-morphology.htm) (the study of word structures and variations), [syntax](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-syntax.htm) (how words are arranged into sentences), [semantics](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-semantics.htm) (the meaning of words), pragmatics (how sentences are used to communicate messages in specific contexts), and [discourse](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-discourse.htm) analysis (the highest level of analysis, looking at texts). Many students gain some exposure to these concepts as early as elementary school, but delving deeply into them tends to be a job for language majors or linguist.



Phonetics is a discipline of [linguistics](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-linguistics.htm) that focuses on the study of the sounds used in speech. Phonetics is not concerned with the meaning of these sounds, the order in which they are placed, or any other factor outside of how they are produced and heard, and their various properties. Phonetics is closely related to [phonology](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-phonology.htm), which focuses on how sounds are understood in a given language, and [semiotics](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-semiotics.htm), which looks at symbols themselves. The International Phonetic Association has a special alphabet for describing all of the different sounds, or phones, currently thought to be used in human speech. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has more than 100 distinct phones listed and given distinct notation. Sounds can be separated into a number of different groups, based on whether they use air from the lungs or not, whether they are voiced or not, the position of the tongue in the mouth, and how the sound is altered. While the bulk of sounds made by the speakers of the world fall into a somewhat narrow band of this spectrum, there are other sounds that are quite different, such as the clicks and smacking sounds made in some African [languages](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-most-common-languages.htm). Most [consonants](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-consonant.htm), called pulmonic consonants, use air from the lungs and can be placed on a grid depending on which parts of the vocal tract are used to articulate the speech sound and how air is obstructed as it passes through the mouth. For example, the sound /p/ uses both lips to articulate air, and is therefore known as a bilabial. It also consists of a full stop of air, known as a plosive. The /p/ sound, therefore, as well as the /b/ sound, can be described as a bilabial plosive. The /b/ sound, since the vocal fold is vibrating as it is said, is called a voiced bilabial plosive, while the /p/ sound, which has no such vibration, is called an unvoiced bilabial plosive

Phonology

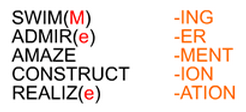
Phonology is the study of sounds and speech patterns in language. The root "phone" in phonology relates to sounds and originates from the Greek word phonema which means sound. Phonology seeks to discern the sounds made in all human[languages](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-most-common-languages.htm). The identification of universal and non-universal qualities of sounds is a crucial component in phonology as all languages use syllables and forms of vowels and [consonants](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-consonant.htm).

Syllables are involved in the timing of spoken language since speaking each word takes a portion of time. Syllables are units of measurement in language. Vowels allow air to escape from the mouth and nose unblocked, while consonants create more covering of the vocal tract by the tongue. The heard friction that is a [consonant](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-consonant.htm) is made from the air that cannot escape as the mouth utters the consonant.

Phonemes are units of sound in a language that convey meaning. For example, changing a syllable in a word will change its meaning, such as changing the "a" in "mad" to an "o" to produce "mod". A [phoneme](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-phoneme.htm) can also achieve no meaning by creating non-existent words such as by changing the "m" in "mad" or "mod" to a "j" to produce "jad" or "jod". Phonemes differ from morphemes and graphemes. A [morpheme](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-morpheme.htm) refers to main grammar units, while a grapheme is the main unit of written language.

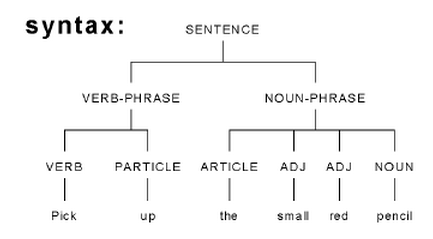
Ensuring that the proper pronunciation is used in a language is a practical application of phonology. For example, phonology uses symbols to differentiate the sounds of a particular vowel. The vowels are classified into "front", "central", and "back" depending on the positioning of the jaw and tongue when the vowel sounds are made. Phonology also notes lip position such as if the lips are spread out or rounded as well as if the vowel sound is long or short.

The symbol for the vowel sound in words such as "chilly" or "[tin](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-tin.htm)" in phonology is /i/ and refers to a front, short vowel spoken with a tongue in high position and spread lips. Contrastingly, the symbol for the vowel sound in words such as "moon" or "blue" in phonology is /u:/ and refers to a back, long vowel spoken with a tongue in high position still, but with rounded lips

**Morphology ** is a field of [linguistics](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-linguistics.htm) focused on the study of the forms and formation of words in a language. A morpheme is the smallest indivisible unit of a language that retains meaning. The rules of morphology within a language tend to be relatively regular, so that if one sees the [noun](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-noun.htm) morphemes for the first time, for example, one can deduce that it is likely related to the word morpheme.

There are three main types of [languages](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-most-common-languages.htm) when it comes to morphology: two of these are polysynthetic, meaning that words are made up of connected morphemes. One type of polysynthetic language is a fusional or inflected language, in which morphemes are squeezed together and often changed dramatically in the process. English is a good example of a fusional language. The other type of polysynthetic language is an agglutinative language, in which morphemes are connected but remain more or less unchanged – many Native American languages, as well as [Swahili](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-swahili.htm), Japanese, German and Hungarian, demonstrate this. At the other end of the spectrum are the analytic or isolating languages, in which a great majority of morphemes remain independent words – Mandarin is the best example of this. Morphology studies all of these different types of languages and how they relate to one another as well.

This can be a confusing concept, so an example may be helpful. Looking at the morphology of English, which is not a particularly inflected language in its modern form, but retains a number of remnants, we could create the word frighteningly, which is made up of four morphemes: fright, which is a noun; en, which converts the noun to a [verb](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-verb.htm); ing, which converts it to an [adjective](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-adjective.htm); and ly, which converts it to an [adverb](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-adverb.htm). Over time, languages tend to become less and less inflected – particularly when a lot of intercultural contact occurs. In morphology, this is because the languages become **creolized (**A **creole language**, or simply a **creole**, is a stable [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language) that has originated from a [pidgin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pidgin) language that has been nativized (that is, acquired by children). The vocabulary of a creole language consists of cognates from the parent languages, though there are often clear phonetic and semantic shifts. On the other hand, the grammar often has original features but may differ substantially from those of the parent languages. Most often, the vocabulary comes from the dominant group and the grammar from the subordinate group, where such stratification exits. For example, Jamaican Creole features largely English words superimposed on West African grammar) **as various pidgins used for communicating between disparate groups become natively spoken, and inter-communication in the pidgins is** facilitated by dropping inflections

**Syntax** is the discipline that examines the rules of a language that dictate how the various parts of sentences go together. While [morphology](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-morphology.htm) looks at how the smallest linguistic unit (called morphemes) are formed into complete words, syntax looks at how those words are formed into complete sentences. 

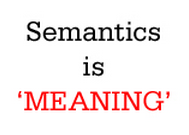
Syntax is not prescriptivist – which is to say, it does not attempt to tell people what the objectively correct way to form a sentence is. Rather, it is descriptivist, in that it looks at how language is actually used and tries to come up with rules that successfully describe what various language communities consider to be grammatical or non-grammatical. Syntax deals with a number of things, all of which help to facilitate being understood and understanding language. Without rules of syntax, there would be no foundation from which to try to discern meaning from a bunch of words strung together, whereas with syntax, an infinite number of sentences are possible using a fairly small finite number of rules

One part of syntax, called inflection (In [grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar), **inflection** or **inflexion** is the modification of a word to express different [grammatical categories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_category) such as [tense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_tense), [mood](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_mood), [voice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_voice), [aspect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_aspect), [person](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_person), [number](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_number),[gender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_gender) and [case](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_case). [Conjugation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_conjugation) is the inflection of [verbs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verb); [declension](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declension) is the inflection of [nouns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun), [adjectives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adjective) and [pronouns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pronoun).), deals with how the end of a word might change to tell a listener or reader something about the role that word is playing. Regular [verbs](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-verb.htm) in English, for example, change their ending based on the tense the [verb](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-verb.htm) is representing in a sentence, so that when we see Robert danced, we know the sentence is in the past tense, and when we seeRobert is dancing, we know it is not. As another example, regular [nouns](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-noun.htm) in English become plural simply by adding an s to the end. Cues like these play a large role in helping hearers to understand sentences.

Another part of syntax covers the various parts of speech that a language uses and separates the words of the language into these groups. Each part of speech in turn has various rules that may be applied to it, and other rules that dictate when it can’t be used. English, for example, makes use of nouns, verbs, [adjectives](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-adjective.htm), articles, [pronouns](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-pronoun.htm), [prepositions](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-preposition.htm), [adverbs](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-adverb.htm), and others, while other [languages](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-most-common-languages.htm) may not have a separate class for adjectives or may make use of classes not found in English.

Perhaps the most important aspect of syntax is how the various parts of speech connect together. Every language has rules that dictate where a part of speech is allowed and where it is not, and how to interpret the resulting sentence. For example, in English, our basic order is Subject Verb Object; this means that in a simple sentence, the first [noun](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-noun.htm) phrase is the subject, and the subsequent verb phrase may contain the object. This allows us to deduce that in the sentence The boy kicked the ball, the boy is the subject, and therefore the one doing the kicking, whereas the ball is the object, and therefore being kicked. If the sentence were The ball kicked the boy, the meaning would be reversed somewhat confusingly, and if it were Kicked the ball the boy, we would immediately recognize it as violating our basic syntactical order and therefore as being ungrammatical.

**Semantics** is the study of meaning in language. In particular, it is the study of how meaning is structured in sentences, phrases, and words. The English term “semantics” comes from the Greek semantikoswhich means to show or give signs. Semantics can be applied to different kinds of symbol systems, such as [computer](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-computer.htm) [languages](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-the-most-common-languages.htm) and similar coding systems. In general, however, semantics generally refers to how meaning is conveyed through the symbols of a written language. Semantics can be understood when it is contrasted with another linguistic term, [syntax](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-syntax.htm). Syntax is the study of rules regarding how symbols are arranged. Syntax is the study of the structure of a language while semantics is the study of the meaning of a language.



When studying semantics, it is important to recognize the generally accepted meaning of a word or term rather than the literal meaning. Take the term “water pill” for example. The term “water pill” is an accepted term for a kind of [diuretic](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-diuretics.htm). These pills are often taken by people who, for one reason or another, are retaining too much water in their bodies. If we were to look at the literal meaning of the word “water pill,” the term would seem to indicate a pill filled with water. Of course, it is quite the opposite; when the pill is ingested it causes a person to lose water.

The following is a famous [Groucho Marx](http://www.wisegeek.com/who-is-groucho-marx.htm) quote that is often referred to by linguists in discussions regarding semantics:

“One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.”

Upon reading the first sentence, it seems that Marx woke up one morning and shot an elephant. However, Marx reverses the meaning of the sentence in the second sentence in which we learn that the elephant was literally inside of his pajamas.

In the study of semantics, the generally accepted meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence is compared to the possible meaning of the same word, phrase, or sentence. When one first reads the word “crash,” for example, a car accident may leap to mind. However, the term can also be used to discuss the sound that is created when a pair of large symbols are brought together in a piece of music, or how waves break against a rocky coast

## The term discourse has several definitions. In the study of language, discourse often refers to the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects, and acceptable statements, within a community. It is a subject of study in peoples who live in secluded areas and share similar speech conventions.

Sociologists and philosophers tend to use the term discourse to describe the conversations and the meaning behind them by a group of people who hold certain ideas in common. Such is the definitions by [philosopher](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-philosopher.htm) Michel [Foucault](http://www.wisegeek.com/who-is-michel-foucault.htm), who holds discourse to be the acceptable statements made by a certain type of discourse community. This explanation will primarily consider the definition pertaining to sociology.

A discourse community can be defined as people who share similar thoughts and ideas. The fan base of the Rolling Stones for example, might constitute a discourse community. Within this fan base, certain attitudes would be considered unacceptable and outside of the community. For example, someone who did not hold the song Brown Sugar in the same high esteem as other members of the discourse community might be summarily tossed out on his ear. [Ideology](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-ideology.htm) defines what can be discussed.

Discourse in this manner can exist over time and represents the total of all written/spoken/recorded thoughts that the community claims. Thus early analysis of the Rolling Stones is as valid as opinions held today by modern fans. When discourse applies to a larger philosophical ideal, like [Marxism](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-marxism.htm), discourse explaining Marxism, predating Marxism, and applying Marxism to today would all be part of the community, and some study the history of such discourse.

Discourse is flexible to the degree to which a discourse community allows such. For example the discourse of the post-structuralists tends to be wide open to new interpretations and ideas, as well as vehement attacks on the contribution of others. As long as some members of the community accept new discourse, then it forms part of the community and thus exists without a time line.

Rhetoricians and philosophers often speak of competing discourses. We can see such an example in the Christian right movement and the liberal left. Each group has a discourse that competes with other thoughts and beliefs and each has a history. Some study the times when certain competing discourses begin to emerge and become more popular. For example, a philosopher or [political scientist](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-does-a-political-scientist-do.htm) might look at the predominant religious right and question how this discourse influenced presidential elections.

The same analysis of competing discourses might be applied to approaches to literature or art. For example, for a while, post-modernist discourse tended to be most influential in the study and interpretation of art. This has led to a [backlash](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-backlash.htm) from formalist critics and their discourse community. Philosophers like Foucault see competing discourses as something akin to war. In fact, real war can be often attributed to competing discourses.

Others liken discourse and its communities to an essential need for humans to express belonging and share beliefs. The variety of discourse communities is essential because of a person’s individual needs. Evaluation of discourse helps us to discover trends in all discourse communities.

Studies may also exist to determine how words within discourse can express viewpoints. The words couch [potato](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-potato.htm) has negative connotations and is primarily employed by those who view watching television as an inferior activity. Contrasting this to the words avid television fan shows how feelings about a subject are often expressed in words. A liberal person might employ the term bible thumper, where a person belonging to the religious right might employ the term religious right. **Language choice frequently defines where our thoughts and allegiances lie.**

Some effort has been made to nullify insulting language and discourse communities through what is frequently termed political correctness. However, the language of political correctness is now its own discourse community. Those employing this language believe that words should exist without [sexism](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-sexism.htm) or racism. By using politically correct speech, such members actually are making statements that sexism and racism are not acceptable. Anti-politically correct discourse communities now battle it out with those who consider themselves politically correct. Thus, the two discourse communities are very much as Foucault described, fighting wars of words to express ideology.

# Linguistic theories have many large holes which need to be filled, but possibly one of the most interesting is the question of the origin of language: we have little idea when it was. It could been as long as 2.2 million years ago, with early members of the genus *Homo*, like *Homo habilis*, or as recently as 200,000 years ago, when modern humans evolved in Africa. Because spoken language leaves no artifacts, analysis of early language use circumstantial evidence like tool complexity. Based on anatomical studies, many scientists suspect that [Neanderthals](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-neanderthals.htm) had some rudimentary form of language, and crude reconstructions of Neanderthals pronouncing vowel noises have been synthesized in computers.

Grammar may be separated into two common broad categories: descriptive and prescriptive.

Both views of grammar are in wide use, although in general, linguists tend towards a descriptive approach to grammar, while people teaching a specific language — such as English — might tend towards a more prescriptive approach. Usually, there is a bit of give and take in any approach, with a prescriptivist being at least somewhat descriptive, and a descriptivist having some prescriptivist tendencies

A descriptive grammar tries to look at the grammar of any spoken language or dialect as it actually exists, judging whether a sentence is grammatical or not based on the rules of the speech group in which it is spoken, rather than an arbitrary set of rules. For example, in many speech communities, a sentence such as, "He done got thrown off the horse," would be entirely grammatical, and an entire set of rules of grammar can be deduced that explain why that formation is grammatical. In another speech community, however, this sentence might be considered ungrammatical, while a version such as, "Him isa throwned offa horse," would be the grammatical version. In yet another speech community, both would be considered ungrammatical, with only a version such as, "He was thrown off of the horse," being considered acceptable.

A prescriptive grammar looks at the norms of speech as given by authoritative sources, such as an upper-class or academic subculture, and creates strict rules by which all speech within that language must abide to be considered grammatical. Few linguists take a prescriptive approach to grammar in the modern age, preferring to describe language as it exists in a given speech community. Many teachers, grammar mavens, and pedagogues in general still have a prescriptive approach towards grammar, however, holding to standardized rules as being the only proper way to speak.

Prescriptive grammar is also used to some extent in teaching a language to non-native speakers. When teaching English, for example, it can be useful to employ a "standard" form of English as a baseline to teach from, to help reduce confusion among students. Once the language has been acquired, of course, a less-prescriptive approach will necessarily take over, as the non-native speaker learns regional rules and new dialects that may not conform to the prescriptive grammar he or she originally learned.

In [linguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics), a register is a [variety](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_(linguistics)) of a [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language) used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting. For example, an [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) speaker may adhere more closely to [prescribed grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prescription_and_description), pronounce words ending in -ing with a [velar nasal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velar_nasal) instead of an [alveolar nasal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alveolar_nasal) (e.g. "walking", not "walkin'"), choose more formal words (e.g. *father* vs. *dad,* *sodium chloride* vs. *salt,* *child* vs. *kid,* etc.), and refrain from using the word *[ain't](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ain%27t" \o "Ain't)* when speaking in a formal setting, but the same person could violate all of these prescriptions in an informal setting.

As with other types of language variation, there tends to be a spectrum of registers rather than a discrete set of obviously distinct varieties — there is a countless number of registers we could identify, with no clear boundaries. Discourse categorisation is a complex problem, and even in the general definition of "register" given above (language variation defined by use not user), there are cases where other kinds of language variation, such as regional or age dialect, overlap. As a result of this complexity, there is far from consensus about the meanings of terms like "register", "field" or "tenor"; different writers' definitions of these terms are often in direct contradiction of each other. Additional terms such as diatype, [genre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre), [text types](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_types), [style](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stylistics_(linguistics)), [acrolect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acrolect), [mesolect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesolect" \o "Mesolect) and [basilect](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilect) among many others may be used to cover the same or similar ground. Some prefer to restrict the domain of the term "register" to a specific vocabulary (Wardhaugh, 1986) (which one might commonly call [jargon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jargon)), while others argue against the use of the term altogether. These various approaches with their own "register" or set of terms and meanings fall under disciplines such as [sociolinguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociolinguistics), [stylistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stylistics_(linguistics)" \o "Stylistics (linguistics)),[pragmatics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatics) or [systemic functional grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systemic_functional_grammar).

**What is Literacy?**

Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy.

It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations.

For an advanced technological society such as Australia, the goal is an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, in order to participate effectively in society.

Literacy is the ability to read, write, speak and listen to language in a way that allows people to communicate with each other and to make sense of the world.

It is widely accepted that literacy is a crucial skill to have. Most people who are able to read take the skill for granted, almost as though it were a natural ability. This is especially true for people who learned to read at a young age. However, being illiterate in the modern world can be rather hazardous. If a person does not know how to read, it is impossible to review a document before signing it, fill out a job application, interpret a standard map, read the ingredients on a package of food or medicine, or understand caution signs. These are just a few instances in which literacy is crucial

The big one that everybody thinks about when they hear the L word is bits of paper stuck together. But if we look just at pen and paper literacies, I suppose what we have to aim for is somebody who wants to read, write, enjoys reading, loves writing, and is able to seek out the intricacies of and in the language, to draw inferences from it, to play with it. They are all context-driven: attitudes, wants and context-driven complex skills, but especially the inferences depend on context.

If you can infer, puzzle out other people's implicit assumptions, you are ready to start implying, setting other people up to make inferences from what you write. Now this was triggered by somebody who said not to mention the testing, but if I am even partly right, how would you set "objective" questions to test that sort of thing? With due respect, Minister, you spavined failed teacher of English, the tests are but a pale reflection, seen through a glass darkly, of what we know. You can judge literacy, you cannot test it.

I think that is a pity because it denies the oral and bardic traditions that nurtured the human spirit over four thousand generations, in favour of a more restricted written superstructure that has only been there as part of the human culture for about five generations, or maybe ten.

We look at those capable of stringing sentences together, those capable of interpreting sentences by others, with varying complexity, we look for a power of word play, and a joy in it. We look for functional literacy too, the ability to extract information from text, whether it be surfing magazines, a financial report, or a Dickensian picture of slum life. We look for a willingness to continue reading SOMETHING, even the labels on jars and bottles

In general, literacy today is perceived to be social by nature rather than merely an individual's set of skills, and there is consensus among literacy researchers that the meaning of literacy depends on the context in which it is being use

## Literacy

**Literacy as described in the NSW DET *Literacy K-12 Policy***

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| --- | --- |
| 1.1.1 | Literacy is the ability to understand and evaluate meaning through reading and writing, listening and speaking, viewing and representing. |
| 1.1.2 | Literacy skills need to continually expand and diversify because our rapidly changing social and economic environment requires competence in a range of new communication forms and media. |
| 1.1.3 | Literacy competence is central to achievement in all areas of learning as students progress through the early, middle and later years of schooling and into the workforce and personal life. |

In the 21st century, the definition of literacy has expanded to refer to a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia.